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ABSTRACT

This research deals with the legal, social and cultural contexts in which informal adoption of black children by adults takes place in rural south Alabama. A total of 306 parent surrogates were identified, interviewed and compared on the basis of 10 socioeconomic characteristics. Information was also collected on the number of children informally adopted in each house, reasons for the adoption, available alternatives to adoption, length of adoption period designated and circumstances of the parent and the parent surrogate when the child was taken in, characteristics of the child, and the relationship of child and parent surrogates with the natural parents. Data were collected on the incidence of parental request for retrieval of the child, on parental assistance in the care of the child, on the adoption children's physical and psychological condition, and on the parent surrogates. knowledge of the level adoption system. Analysis of the data indicated that there was a high degree of satisfaction and acceptance of the informal adoption arrangement, that the children were accepted into the surrogate homes as natural children, and that legal adoption was rarely considered or sought by these rural people. It is noted that the stringent requirements for legal adoption would deny many of the parent surrogates in this study the opportunity to become adoptive parents. Improvements in income, educational and health services are suggested as solutions which would not impair the traditional social concern among such people that assures children parental love and care. (GO)

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# INFORMAL ADOPTION IN BLACK FAMILIES IN LOWNDES AND WILCOX COUNTIES, ALABAMA

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Lewis W. Jones

The problem this research considers is that of illuminating the legal, social and cultural contexts in which informal adoption of black children by adults (persons other than blood parents who may or may not be related to them) takes place in the rural South. The results should reveal any patterns in the adoptive process. Such adoptions are conceived of as occurring where there is no evidence within the household of following the legal prescriptions governing legal adoption, nor of following the administrative directives of social agencies. It may take place when a child is left with a grandmother or an aunt, neighbor or acquaintance, as a result of a tragedy in the life of the child's parents or parent, or it may occur more casually as with run-aways, abandoned children, and out-of-wedlock children who find a temporary shelter becomes a permanent home.

Despite references in the literature to informal adoption, no intensive study has been made of the variety of child-parent surrogate arrangements. This exploratory study was undertaken to gather descriptive information. Objectives of the research as set forth in the study proposal are:

A. To describe the legal, social and cultural contexts in which informal adoption takes place in the deep South,

B. To gather descriptive data on informal adoption practices and their variations,

C. To ascertain the forms which such arrangements may take,

D. To determine the stability of the relationships,

E. To determine the quality of the child rearing,

F. To determine whether the child's welfare is protected

G. To measure the adequacy of informal adoption as contrasted with legal adoption,

H. To assess the degree of awareness on the part of adults and children living in such arrangements of their legal rights and responsibilities; and on the basis of this information (A-H),

I. To assist in formulating such child-advocacy measures, whether legal, administrative, or both, as will appear to help protect the rights of both children and adults, consistent with the best interests of both the individual and the larger society.

SUMMARY OF ALABAMA ADOPTION CODES

Adoption is a legal procedure through court action, by which a minor becomes a child of a new parent other than his natural ones. (Alabama State Bar pamphlet on "How to Adopt A Child in Alabama").

According to the "Adoption Code of Alabama", any proper adult person, or husband and wife jointly, may petition the probate court of the state in which they reside, or in which the child had legal residence when it became a public charge for leave to adopt a child, who is under 21. The law provides that a child be placed for adoption only by the State Department of Pensions and Security or by a licensed child placing agency, or by the parent or guardian. Persons not authorized are barred by statute from acting as intermediaries to find homes for a child. A study is usually made of a family's application to adopt a child and such factors as health, age, income, and stability of marriage is considered. An agency does not place a child for adoption until written consent for the adoption has been given by one of the following:

1. Both parents, if living (if the courts have legally terminated parental rights, consent will not be requested)
2. Mother alone, if the child is illegitimate
3. Guardian of the minor
4. State Department of Pensions and Security

After consent is given the adoption petition is filed along with the child's birth certificate. The probate court usually hears the petition for adoption. If the court is satisfied the necessary consents have been filed, and that the adoption is in the best interest of the child, he shall enter an interlocutory order of adoption. A final order may be entered after the child has lived for six months in the home of the petitioner. The Department of Pensions and Security must visit the home at least twice during the six-month period.

The Department of Pensions and Security does not have to investigate and report to the court on petitions filed by a stepfather, stepmother, grandmother, brother, half-brother, sister, half-sister, aunt, or uncle and their spouses. The decision is left entirely up to the court. If the court determines that the child has resided in the home of the relative for the specified period of time as required by law, the court may immediately enter the final order of adoption. Children living with unrelated persons have to go through regular adoption procedures. The adopted person shall be entitled to inherit from and through the adoptive parents and the adoptive parent can inherit from and through the adopted person. However, rights of inheritance are affected by Wills. The court is required by law to mail a certificate of the final order of adoption to the State Registrar of Vital Statistics and a new birth certificate for the person adopted is recorded.

A discussion of Alabama Adoption Statutes, with a person from the Department of Pensions and Security, revealed that it is possible that many of the families in our study could very well lose custody of the children that they are keeping if they filed for adoption. Although there are no set standards for socio-economic status of the potential adoptive parents, many of these families would not measure up to minimal standards. These families certainly would not have such things as a small savings account to help them in case of an emergency. It is true, of course, that since investigations for relatives are no longer required, it would make it easier for relatives to adopt. However, the Department does like to feel that adoption is a sound plan for the child. There has been some subsidized adoptions on an individual basis and if this were continued it would possibly make it easier for some other families to adopt.

The time-honored social responsibility for care of children deprived of parental care takes little account of legal prescriptions and in the out-of-the-way rural places there is little demonstrable concern on the part of legal authorities for interfering with customary arrangements. What the legal provisions are need to be known in any assessment of the non-legal arrangements.

## RELATED LITERATURE

According to the annual report for the Department of Pensions and Security in Alabama, three-hundred and nineteen children were placed for adoption last year. Forty-eight of these children were black. This represents a slight increase from the previous year, but there are still black children of all ages awaiting adoptive homes. The lack of adoptive homes for Negro children in need of placement is a problem familiar and painful to persons working with social agencies. (Herzog, Bernstein, 1966; Billingsley and Giovannoni 1972). An estimate given in 1969 by the National Center for Social Statistics, shows that the percentage of all children adopted, who are black or belong to other minority races, has not risen significantly despite special efforts by social agencies to find adoptive homes for them. In a recent study by the Child Welfare League (Gro , 1970) it was found that in 240 agencies providing racial data on approved homes and children available for adoption, there were 116 white homes approved for every 100 non-white children reported as needing adoptive placement. It is interesting to note that Herzog and Bernstein (1965) report that contrary to the usual beliefs, when adequate controls are established for income levels and family intactness, actual adoption rates appear higher among blacks than whites.

In an "experience survey" (Herzog, Sudia et. al) the deterrents to adoption are listed as being: (1) lack of public information; (2) anxieties of potential adoptive parents; (3) possible characteristics of the child; (4) adverse attitudes of others; (5) legal complications; (6) characteristics of social agencies. However, the leading single deterrence which is listed under "anxieties of potential adoptive parents" is economic insufficiency and inadequacy. Many black families have neither room enough nor enough income to accomodate new members.

The Hill study (1971) has pointed out that formal adoption agencies have not, historically, catered to non-whites. As a result of this adoption in Negro communities, it differs from the conventions operating in this country. (Herkovits, 1958). Blacks have developed their own network for the informal adoption of children, (Hill, 1971).

Johnson (1934) and Powdermaker (1939) refer to informal adoption as "adoption". Powdermaker (1939) states that "adoption" is practically never made legal and is referred to as "giving" the child away. Johnson's study (1934) and Bernard's (1966) show that adoption of children is fairly common practice among blacks. Johnson even states that in a sense "adoption" takes the place of social agencies and orphans' homes. The data presently on hand does not account for this distinctive quality of Negro custom, (Herkovits, 1953).

Powdermaker (1939) cites one of the main reasons for so frequently giving children away is the breaking up of families and the unwillingness or inability of the remaining mate to care for the children. Most people in rural areas love children and consequently there is always someone ready to take in a child that needs a home, even if their home is already overcrowded. Childless couples, for whatever reason, do not have the social standing in the community as families with children, (Johnson, 1934). One young woman in the Powdermaker study (1939) who was pregnant was "so glad" because "what is a house like without a child in it?"

For a father or mother to go away and leave a child with relatives or friends, who are glad to take it, is so regular an occurrence that it is not felt to be something to grieve about. No stigma is attached to giving away a child; it is an accepted procedure, (Powdermaker, 1939). Johnson (1934) does mention that parents hesitated to give their children away to non-related persons, although this happened a number of times.

In his study of Farmville, Virginia in 1897, W. E. B. DuBois made the observation that:

> "The proportion of children under 15 is also increased by the habit which married couples and widowed persons have of going to cities to work and leaving their children with grandparents. This also accounts for the small proportion of children in a city like Philadelphia".

There is no attempt made to conceal their origin from adopted children, even if the event took place in early infancy. The children usually know they have been given away because adults talk about it freely. Both Johnson (1934) and Powdermaker (1939) found that no difference was made between the adopted children and the children of the house. "Adopted children seldom evince any since of being outsiders."

According to a report by the Urban League (1971) black families demonstrate their ability to "adopt" children with a placement rate more than ten times that of formal adoption agencies. It is estimated that more than 160,000 out-of-wedlock black babies were absorbed in 1969 by already existing black families. Johnson (1934) even mentions that adoption is related to illegitimacy.

Black families have a remarkable story in what they have done for grandchildren, (Herzog, Sudia et. al ). The Young study (1970) also stresses the functional and systematic aspects of the black family in which grandparents play an important role. Johnson (1934) reported that the frequency of separations of families with children and the large number of children born outside of formal family relations throw a considerable burden of responsibility upon grandparents, and this responsibility, in turn, is accepted as a matter of course. Grandparents expressed more of a sense of social obligation than did parents with a number of children.

In 1965 the United States Census Bureau reported that nearly 15 per cent of all Negro families had one or more minor relatives living with them who was not their own child, and better than a quarter of all Negro families had a relative living with them who was eighteen or over. The recent study by Hays and Mindell (1973) and Billingsley (1968) showed that more black families have kin other than their own children living with them than whites. Hays and Mindell (1973) found that 28% of the black families have kin living with them as opposed to four per cent of the white families. Most of these relatives are grandchildren, nieces and nephews. The 1970 Census also reports that black families are much more likely than white families to take in other young related members. Black children are even more likely than white children to be adopted by relatives when they are formally placed, (Hill, 1971).

Most of the writers seem to agree that most of these families would not qualify to formally adopt a child. According to Hill (1971) the families headed by elderly women take in the highest proportion of children. Most of these families do not possess the "right" credentials to formally adopt. They are most often fatherless or "too poor" or too disorganized. It is difficult for them to provide adequately for their own children without taking in additional ones. However, Johnson (1934) found that only a few of these families would not attempt to rear a child left with them, no matter how poor they may be. Many of these

families may be illiterate or have only a minimal amount of formal schooling, but they are usually willing and eager to make sacrifices to educate the children that they take in, (Powdermaker, 1939).

The tight kinship network within black families seems to have proven itself to be an effective mechanism for providing extra emotional and economic support in the lives of thousands of children. This is a family strength that is clearly in need of support through imaginative adoption policies, (Hill, 1971) or other systematic alternatives.

## CHILD WELFARE APPARATUS

Most of the services provided for children in the county are through the Department of Pensions and Security. The Department cannot remove a child from a home without permission from a court of law. If there are problems that warrant removal of a child from a home, Boarding Foster Care Homes are available. Boarding Foster Care Homes are licensed by the State and have been investigated in a similar manner as the homes of adoptive parents. If a parent is ill or for some reason feels that he cannot care for his child, he can request that the child be temporarily placed in a Boarding Foster Home until he is able to care for the child. A parent who can afford it may pay some or all of the expenses for the child's care. Contact is usually maintained with the parent so that the child won't lose his parents. Arrangements for visits are usually made outside of the homes to prevent conflict between the parent and foster family. According to the Annual Report

of the Department of Pensions and Security for 1971-72 in the State of Alabama, 1,975 children benefited from the care of state and county boarding homes. A breakdown for individual counties was not available.

Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) is provided in the county through the Department of Persions and Security. The services offered to ADC applicants pertain to employment, money management, school attendance, family relationships, health, housing, family planning, child rearing and various other matters which affect family life. However, the child must be related to the family that he lives with. Aid is not available to children living with non-related persons. The amount of aid given will depend on how much money the Deparument has, the children's needs, and how many people receive aid to dependent children. The highest payment to a relative for the first child is $55.00 a month, and for each additional child, $35.00. No payment can be made to a relative for more than $195.00 a month, regardless of the need or number of eligible children. A child can receive aid until he is 18. If he is in regular attendance in school, he can receive aid until he is 21. A total of 119,787 children received aid and service in their own or related homes through ADC in 1971-72 throughout Alabama. (Social Welfare Journal), according to Social Security regulations.

A child must be dependent upon his insured parents in order to qualify for benefits on his parent's social security record.

The factors that determine whether a child is dependent upon a parent vary. Adoption of a child after the death of the child's natural parent does not prevent the child's right to inherit from the deceased natural parents. A child can also receive benefits from his natural parents if they are alive and he has been adopted.

A child who is the subject of an unfulfilled contract to adopt may under certain conditions have the status of a child for the purpose of sharing in the distribution of the interstate personal property of his natural father, if he is legitimated or acknowledged, as provided by State law. All states allow the illegitimate child to receive benefits from the natural mother.

Our inquiries did not reveal any financial provisions in the county for children living with unrelated persons. All forms of state aid is available if the child lives with a relative. It appears that if the parent surrogate of an unrelated child is willing to go through legal procedures to show that the child has been abandoned, or that his parents cannot care for him the child could become eligible for benefits provided by the State.

## THE STUDY AREA

Selection of the study area was made with the assumption that the practice of informal adoption would more likely be followed in an area that was rural where custom had been least disturbed. Another consideration was that the Tuskegee Institute Human Resources Development Center had selected an eleven-county area in the Alabama Black Belt as a service and experimental area. Choice of this area would give a better chance for subsequent program development for children deprived of their parents that would be likely elsewhere.

According to the 1970 Census, there were 1,432,244 people reported living in rural Alabama, divided: 1,209,396 Rural Non-Farm and 222,196 Rural Farm. The rural Negro population was divided 294,936 Rural Non-Farm and 45,179, or only 16 per cent Rural Farm. The area selected was in two Alabama counties that come in the classification of America's most rural Non-Commuting counties in a 1972 study for U. S. Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.

In the foreword to this study, Characteristics of U. S. Rural Areas with Non-Commuting Population, Senator Herman Talmadge writes:

> "While workers living in the rural commuting counties often have jobs in nearby urban employment centers, less than 10 percent of the workers in these 1,718 most rural counties are able to commute to city jobs. They have no nearby growth centers to depend upon. The incidence of poverty in these most rural counties is more than double that in the non-rural counties; with 12 percent of the Nation's

> population, they have 24 per cent of the Nation's poverty. Yet, only 2.1 per cent of Federal outlays for basic adult education, 5.5 per cent of health services, and 17 per cent of Federal elementary and secondary education appropriations go to these counties."

Demographic Data on Wilcox and Lowndes Counties

The two counties selected for study are located in the southeastern central section of the State of Alabama. Both Lowndes and Wilcox counties are 100 per cent rural; while 41 per cent of the State is rural.* Only 18 per cent of Lowndes is rural-farm and 14 per cent of Wilcox. Another important factor in the selection of these counties is the high youth dependency ratio (defined as one hundred times the number of people less than 15 years of age divided by the population aged 15 through 64). Lowndes county has a ratio of 88 for blacks as compared to 41 for non-blacks. The ratio is similar for Wilcox county with a black dependency ratio of 43 and 45 for non-blacks. This means that for every 100 adults, there are 88 children or more than twice as many children as the number cared for by the white adult population. Both counties are identical in the percentage of black husband-wife heads of household (60%). In the State 84 per cent of families are headed by husband and wife. Within the two-county area 85 per cent of the population lacks plumbing. The average number of

*Demographic data is based on General Social and Economic Characristics; Alabama U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1972.

Demographic Profiles of the United States: The East South Central States, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, 1972.

persons per room is double that of the State as a whole.

An interesting way of thinking of the demography of the rural South is in terms of three populations: those who left there, those who migrated to the South and native rural southerners. There was loss of population of 14.4 per cent between 1950 and 1960 and was 16.3 per cent between 1960 and 1970. Lowndes County has a population of 12,897; Wilcox 16,303. More than 90 per cent of the population residing in both counties is native. There is not much migration within the counties. People generally remain in the same house; or move within the same county. People who have migrated to these counties since 1965 were most often from other southern states. A small percentage migrated from the North Central or Northeastern States. Data do not reflect natives who have moved away and are returning home.

Progress has been made in education in Alabama in the last decade. But the progress is slow to come to these two counties. The median school grade completed for persons aged twenty-five and older is 8.6 and 8.8 for Lowndes and Wilcox, respectively. Integration has been slow to come; "academies" exist for white students and "training schools" for black students.

In 1969 the median income for the rural white population was $3,093 as compared to $1,323 for the black rural population. The median income for the State is $7,266; $3,823

for Lowndes County; $3,917 for Wilcox. The non-worker ratio for the State is 1.67. The ratio is higher for Wilcox, with 2.62 and even higher for Lowndes with 2.70. Of persons employed in Lowndes County, 16 per cent are in manufacturing, 28 per cent in white collar jobs and 21 per cent in governmental jobs. The figures increase somewhat in Wilcox with 35 per cent in manufacturing, 28 per cent in white collar jobs and 15 per cent in governmental jobs. Almost 50 per cent of the population in both counties have incomes below the poverty level, and about five per cent earn in excess of $15,000.

Cultural Characteristics

A great deal of attention has been given to the negative aspects of black cultural experiences. However, in the recent focus on positive aspects of black culture, the strength which deserves more prominence is the role of black grandmothers. One such grandmother in one county tells of the hard times she had raising her 13 children. At first there was no income, and later for awhile she worked in the fields for 50¢ a day, 60¢ and finally $1.00.

She speaks with favor of the Civil Rights Movement days and the changes that took place - "It got us off the white folks place." With seven of her own children still home, she manages to care for four grandchildren, a niece, an aunt and her retarded daughter. One grandchild had returned with her mother to New York but did not like it so she came back to live with her grandmother. It is hard to find a job in Wilcox county.

The grandmother said children tried unsuccessfully to find work; all had to move away to find work. Her husband tried to get work at a local mill; he works the farm with the help of the family.

One respondent confesses she knows little about birth control (her baby is 10). One daughter has three illegitimate children. When asked what did she say to her daughter during this period she responded, "I told her if it was me, I'd go to the store and get some of those pills." Her daughter said she didn't like them.

She and her family moved to their present location and started to build a home with the help of FHA after they were put out of their home when the Civil Rights Movement came to the county. The doctor says she should stay out of the fields because of her blood pressure, but that doesn't keep her from working. The farm consists of 23 acres of cotton, 40 acres of corn, a little potatoes, peas, peanuts and sugar cane. "I couldn't always put clothes on they back, but they have plenty to eat." No modern equipment exists for picking crops. Seven of the children are able to work in the fields. They haven't cleared anything since 1965, when they cleared $300 one year and $300 another. In 1965 they cleared $500. They haven't been out of debt since. Her son and daughter help by sending money home. Foodstamps also help somewhat. With the help of her son, they now have a nine-room house, enough for everyone to sleep comfortably. The house lacks running water. She was told the welfare could help install plumbing if she charged her grandchildren rent.

The preceding account of family life in Wilcox County is of one family only, but it does reflect the social and economic conditions of other residents.

With Lowndes County being located adjacent to Montgomery County in which the State capitol is located and is the third largest city in the State, it would seem that the residents of Lowndes would take advantage of this location, but this is not reflected in the social and economic conditions. The standard of living in Lowndes is below that of Wilcox. The main source

of employment is a factory located some 20 miles from Haynesville. For a town without central transportation and many of its residents without cars, this is a problem.

Many lives are shaded by "root" doctors. When one widow was asked about her children, she said that she had "one daughter with good mind. One daughter is mental. She do all right until the moon changes. The root doctor says she got fixed in Tampa." The mother wants to take her daughter to see a psychiatrist, but has to wait until the moon changes.

To get a further indication of life in Lowndes County, which is not so different from life in Wilcox County, a closer look is needed into the life of this widow. She gets an "old folks" check each month, but recalls all the years she worked when there was no social security. For her three-room house, with newspaper-covered walls, she pays $150.00 a year for rent. She no longer farms, but does have a few crops planted. She bought an acre of land and wants to build a house to get out of the present one. Most of the grocery shopping is done at a little store nearby. She manages to go to town and catch a sale once in a while, but has to catch a ride with someone. This 74 year old woman has raised two grandchildren, in addition to her own three children and cares for several grandchildren during the day. She was making her own living when she took in her first two grandchildren, but is no longer able to do that.

In general, this county seems to have somewhat more to offer in its downtown area. There are stores for shopping, a motel, two banks and several eating places--one operated by blacks. In the other county, downtown consists of the county courthouse, the post office, a corner grocery and a hardware store. Some residents in both counties have been able to move from their dilapidated house into low-income homes.

THE STUDY POPULATION

In the two counties three hundred and seven families out of a total of 3,917 black families were identified as having children other than their own offspring living in the household. Of the parent surrogates interviewed, two hundred and ninety-six (296) were female, eleven (11) were male.

Ten variables were used to provide a description of the gross characteristics of the parent surrogates and their families. These characteristics follow.

Characteristics

| 1. Family Structure | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Single-Parent/Female | 146 | 47 |
| Single-Parent/Male | 11 | 4 |
| Two Parents | 150 | 49 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

| 2. Marital Status | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Married | 177 | 58 |
| Single | 65 | 21 |
| Widowed | 50 | 16 |
| Separated or Divorced | 15 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

The families were almost equally divided between single-parent female and two-parent families.

While 49 per cent of the families identified themselves as two-parent families, an additional 2[illegible], from surrogates reported themselves as being married despite the absence of the spouse from the household. As reported in the 1970 Census, 51.6 per cent of the children under 18 in Wilcox County and

57.7 of the children under 18 in Lowndes County lived with both parents.

3. Age of Parent Surrogate

| Age | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Under 30 | 7 | 2 |
| 30-39 | 12 | 4 |
| 40-49 | 39 | 13 |
| 50-59 | 81 | 26 |
| 60 and over | 163 | 53 |
| No response | 5 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

As has been reported in other studies older families take children to rear to a greater extent than younger families do. This may be readily expected particularly where the number of related children are considered.

4. Families with Own Children in Household

| | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| With own children | 104 | 34 |
| Without own children | 203 | 66 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Two-thirds of the families had no children of their own in the household.

5. Size of Household

| Number of Persons in Household | Number of Households | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 55 | 18 |
| 3 | 84 | 27 |
| 4 | 41 | 13 |
| 5 | 34 | 11 |
| 6-9 | 66 | 22 |
| 10 or more | 27 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Fifty-nine per cent of the families had five or fewer members and forty-one per cent six or more members.

6. Occupation of Parent Surrogate

| Occupation | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No response | 55 | 18 |
| Farm or rural nonfarm | 41 | 13 |
| Construction Laborer | 3 | 1 |
| Domestic service | 31 | 10 |
| Other service | 10 | 3 |
| Housewife | 133 | 44 |
| Other | 9 | 3 |
| Unemployed | 25 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

7. Present Employment of Parent Surrogate

| Employment | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Full-time | 119 | 38 |
| Part-time | 22 | 7 |
| Housewife, unemployed | 167 | 555 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

8. Total Monthly Income of Household

| Monthly Income | Number of Households | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No response | 17 | 5 |
| $50 and less | 20 | 7 |
| $51-100 | 37 | 12 |
| $101-150 | 64 | 21 |
| $51-200 | 51 | 17 |
| $201-250 | 31 | 10 |
| $251-300 | 28 | 9 |
| $301 and more | 59 | 19 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Only 28 per cent of the families had monthly incomes of more than $250.

9. Education

| Highest School Grade Completed | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No response | 3 | 11 |
| 6 years or less | 15 | 52 |
| 7-9 | 90 | 29 |
| 10-11 | 36 | 12 |
| 12 or more | 19 | 6 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

More than half of the parent surrogates had less than six years of schooling and only six per cent had completed high school.

10. Stability

Lived in county less than 30 years - 8 percent
Lived in community less than 30 years - 18 percent

The parent surrogates have lived their full lives in the local area. Eighty-four per cent had lived in the county where they were all of their lives and another seven per cent had moved to Lowndes County or Wilcox County from elsewhere in Alabama.

Parent surrogates in the study population were older people: 53 per cent over 60 years of age and 79 per cent over 50. Two-thirds of the parent surrogates had children of their own and two-thirds were families of five persons or less. In the homes 49 per cent had a single female parent. The parent surrogates were poor with only 28 per cent having monthly incomes of more than $250.00.

## TAKING CHILDREN TO REAR

Unspoken understandings in the transfer of children from natural parents to parent surrogate seems to justify the designation, "informal adoption". Acceptance of the circumstance requiring someone to care for children seems to have been made by both parental parties with amazingly little ado about it.

CHILDREN OTHER THAN PARENT'S OWN LIVING IN THE HOUSE

| Number of Children | Number of Homes | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 122 | 40 |
| 2 | 95 | 31 |
| 3 | 36 | 12 |
| 4 | 20 | 6 |
| 5 | 12 | 4 |
| 6 or more | 24 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

At the time of the study 307 families had from one to eleven children living in the home. These same families reported 62 children other than their own that they had reared and now had left home.

### REASONS FOR TAKING CHILD INTO HOME

Reasons for taking children to rear were grouped into five categories:

| Reason | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Parental convenience | 141 | 46 |
| Desire for a child | 20 | 6 |
| Family responsibility | 88 | 29 |
| Child needed care | 52 | 17 |
| Temporary arrangement initially | 6 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Parental convenience was given as a reason for taking the child. This reason was expressed in compassionate terms for the child's parents. Some of the terms in which this reason was expressed were:

> Mother had to work; nobody to care for him
> Mother wanted to go on to school
> Mother was ill in hospital
> Mother left these children

Family responsibility - Children reported as having a kinship tie to the parent surrogate; had a near and distant relationship that was considered a family responsibility.

> Child was born in my house and mother left
> My grandchild, daughter had it and left
> My son's child, mother didn't want it
> Child wanted to stay with her grandma and nobody else
> Cousin's child, I could care for it better

Desire for a child

> I wanted a child and I found out I could have this one
> I need company in the house
> I needed someone to help me around the house, so I gave him a home

Child's need for care - The difference between the first reason and this one was expressed in terms of compassion for the child.

> Parents died
> Parents separated
> Parents walked off and left them

Temporary arrangement initially - There were a few cases in which the permanent care of children was not intended.

> My sister went to Chicago and I kept her children. When she came back, this child wouldn't go with her. Mother was living with me and moved, but child didn't want to go with her.

It is interesting that there was need for an arrangement or formal agreement about taking a child to rear in only nine cases. In other cases the taking of the child seemed to have just happened without formality or ritual in transfer of children to the care of the parent surrogate.

In only six cases was it reported that the child did not know that the parent surrogate was not the natural parent, but the other 301 families' children were aware that they were not the offspring of the parent surrogate.

Parent surrogates were questioned about alternatives for the care of the children if they had not assumed responsibility for their care. The following opinions were expressed:

| Alternative | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Could have stayed with mother | 79 | 26 |
| Some other member of family might have taken child | 13 | 4 |
| Might have been placed somewhere else | 13 | 4 |
| Other alternatives | 24 | 8 |
| No other alternative | 173 | 56 |
| No response | 5 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Placement outside the family was rarely considered; 56% of the respondents felt they had no alternative but to take the child in. Thirty per cent said that if they had not agreed the child would have remained with the mother

or someone else in the family.

Ninety-five per cent said no formal arrangement or agreements were made when the child was taken in. In the few cases that arrangements were made, they were most frequently made between the natural and surrogate parents directly.

In one hundred and forty-six cases the parent surrogate reported a definite understanding of how long the child would remain with the parent surrogate.

| Period Designated | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Until Grown | 79 | 54 |
| As Long As I Live | 41 | 28 |
| Other Long Terms | 6 | 4 |
| As Long as She Wants to Stay | 7 | 5 |
| Until Parents Take Him Back | 13 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 146 | 100 |

Of those who said a definite time period was established, most seemed to expect to keep the child until he was grown or as long as they lived. In most cases, the commitments were also open-ended and expected to be indefinite duration.

| How Long Expect to Keep Child | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Until Grown | 80 | 45 |
| As Long As I Live | 73 | 41 |
| As Long As Mother Wants | 13 | 7 |
| Other | 10 | 6 |
| TOTAL | 176 | 99 |

CIRCUMSTANCES OF PARENT SURROGATE WHEN CHILD WAS TAKEN IN

Age

A majority of the respondents were well into middle age when they took their youngest child in. The most frequently cited categories were 40 to 49 and 50 to 59.

Occupation

Fifty-three per cent of the respondents reported that they were farmers when they took the child in. The next most frequently cited occupations were housewife (19 percent) and domestic service (12 percent).

Income

Almost half of the respondents (42 percent) reported an income of under $150/monthly when they took the children in, and 19 per cent reported no income at all.

Health

Ninety-one per cent of the respondents said that they felt well enough to be able to look after the child when he was taken in.

Present Characteristics of Child

Youngest

| Age | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Born here | 95 | 31 |
| 1 or less | 121 | 39 |
| 2-4 | 24 | 8 |
| 5-7 | 14 | 5 |
| 8-10 | 13 | 4 |
| 11-13 | 10 | 3 |
| 14-16 | 2 | 1 |
| NR/NA | 28 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Age at Which Children Were Taken Into Home

| Age | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Not reported | 26 | 8 |
| 1 year or less | 215 | 70 |
| 2-4 years | 24 | 8 |
| 5-10 years | 27 | 9 |
| Over 10 years | 15 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of the children taken in were either born in the surrogate parent's home or taken in before they were a year old. Very few children were taken in when in their teens.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NATURAL PARENTS

Mother's Occupation

Respondents were vague in giving employment status of the child's mother. Only 55 per cent were reported on. Twenty-nine per cent reported that the mother was a farmer when the child was taken in. Fourteen per cent reported that she was unemployed and 12 per cent reported that she was in domestic service.

Father's Occupation

In most cases the occupation of the father was not known. The most frequently cited category was farmer (87 per cent).

| Mother's Age | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 15 and under | 16 | 5 |
| 16-17 | 30 | 10 |
| 18-19 | 59 | 19 |
| 20-21 | 44 | 14 |
| 22-23 | 27 | 9 |
| 24-25 | 13 | 4 |
| 26-27 | 11 | 4 |
| 28- + | 42 | 13 |
| DK | 50 | 16 |
| NR | 15 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 99 |

The ages were distributed fairly even. The most frequently cited age was 18-19. In forty-eight per cent of the cases, the mother was under 21.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATURAL PARENTS

Ninety-eight per cent of the respondents said that the child knew that he was not their child.

In those cases where the child didn't already know, almost all parents reported that they did plan to tell him.

| How Found Out | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Parent surrogate told child | 182 | 59 |
| Natural mother told child | 48 | 16 |
| Knew already | 40 | 13 |
| Other | 25 | 8 |
| NR/NA | 12 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

In a majority of the cases, the parent surrogate told the child that he was not theirs. Less often, it was the natural mother who told him or else the child already knew.

| Reaction to Being Told | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No reaction | 128 | 42 |
| Just accepts | 76 | 25 |
| Glad | 79 | 26 |
| Other | 24 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of the respondents (69%) reported that the child had a positive attitude toward his natural mother or parents.

Where-abouts of Natural Parents

| Mother | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 104 | 34 |
| Other South | 22 | 7 |
| Northeast | 89 | 29 |
| Midwest | 35 | 11 |
| Other | 4 | 1 |
| DK | 2 | 1 |
| NR/NA | 51 | 17 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

| Father | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Alabama | 69 | 22 |
| Other South | 18 | 6 |
| Northeast | 20 | 6 |
| Midwest | 23 | 7 |
| Other | 4 | 1 |
| DK | 133 | 43 |
| NR/NA | 40 | 14 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 99 |

Frequently, the natural mothers remained in Alabama (34%), although a large per cent also migrated North (40%). The where-abouts of the mothers were unknown in only 1 per cent of the cases. For the fathers, however, 43 per cent in unknown locations, while only 22 per cent remained in Alabama and 13 per cent went North.

How Parent Surrogates Get Along With Natural Parents

| Mother | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Very well | 210 | 68 |
| OK | 51 | 17 |
| Hardly ever see | 4 | 1 |
| Poorly | 0 | 0 |
| NR/NA | 42 | 13 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 99 |

| Father | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Very well | 92 | 30 |
| OK | 35 | 11 |
| Hardly ever see | 93 | 30 |
| Poorly | 16 | 5 |
| NR/NA | 71 | 23 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 99 |

A majority of the respondents reported very good relations of the natural mothers (68%) and none reported poor relations. For fathers, the situation was somewhat different; 30 per cent of the respondents reported that they hardly ever see them and only 5 per cent reported that they got along poorly. However, 30 per cent also reported that they got along very well.

How Often Here

| Mother | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Daily | 16 | 5 |
| Often | 43 | 14 |
| 1-2/mo | 70 | 23 |
| 3-4/mo | 67 | 22 |
| Occasionally | 49 | 16 |
| Never | 10 | 3 |
| NR/NA | 52 | 17 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

| Father | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Daily | 9 | 3 |
| Often | 14 | 5 |
| 1-2/mo | 20 | 7 |
| 3-4/mo | 22 | 7 |
| Occasionally | 14 | 5 |
| Never | 172 | 56 |
| NR/NA | 56 | 17 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Mothers keep in pretty close touch. Many keep regular contact several times a month. A majority of the fathers are never heard from. Some do keep in occasional contact.

| Describe Parents | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| OK | 39 | 13 |
| Mother nice, Father not involved | 128 | 42 |
| Good people | 103 | 33 |
| NR/NA | 37 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

In a majority of cases parent surrogates gave very positive description of both parents or of the mother.

| How Parents Treated Child | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Very well | 115 | 37 |
| Good | 90 | 29 |
| Pretty good | 13 | 4 |
| OK | 22 | 7 |
| Best she could | 41 | 13 |
| Don't care | 12 | 4 |
| NR | 14 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

In most cases, the surrogate parent thought the natural parent treated the child well. Only 4 per cent felt they didn't care about them.

Have Parents Ever Tried to Get Child Back?

Ninety-two per cent said no, they had not; only 2 per cent said that they had. This supports earlier report, that the

arrangements is expected to be long term.

Does Parent Visit Child

| Mother | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 232 | 75 |
| No | 28 | 9 |
| NR/NA | 47 | 15 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 99 |

| Father | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 73 | 28 |
| No | 197 | 64 |
| NR/NA | 37 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of the mothers visit the children; while a majority of the fathers do not. However, almost one fourth of the fathers are interested enough to visit.

ASSISTANCE IN CARE OF CHILDREN

Assistance in Care of Child

| Do Parents Support Child | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Mother only | 87 | 28 |
| Father only | 18 | 6 |
| Both | 28 | 9 |
| Neither | 170 | 56 |
| NR | 4 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

In over half the cases, (56%) neither of the parents provide any support for the child. If a parent does provide support, it is most frequently the mother only (28%).

| Type of Support | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Money | 36 | 12 |
| Food | 2 | 1 |
| Clothes | 37 | 12 |
| Money and Food | 2 | 1 |
| Money and Clothes | 27 | 9 |
| Food and Clothes | 6 | 2 |
| All three | 8 | 3 |
| Other | 9 | 3 |
| NR/NA | 178 | 57 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

The most frequent types of help provided by parents were in the form of money and clothes, either alone or in combination.

How Much

Of the parents who were reported as contributing to their child's support, most were described as giving something, but no specific amount. Of those for which a definite amount was reported, over half gave less than $50 per month. Only 2 per cent of the children were reported as not knowing they were adopted. Where-abouts of the natural mothers of children were known in 99 per cent of the cases while where-abouts of the fathers were unknown in 43 per cent of the cases. Relationships between mother surrogates and natural mothers were reported as being generally amicable. In contrast only 41 per cent of natural fathers were reported as having an amicable relationship with surrogate parents. The natural father, (73%) did not keep in contact with the children while 80 per cent of the natural mothers did keep in contact with the children. Despite the record of correspondence and visits, few of the natural parents gave the

parents surrogate any assistance with the support of the children in 28 per cent of cases mother only, 6 per cent fathers only and 9 per cent both parents.

Any Other Help With Child

Sixty-three per cent of the respondents said that no one else helped them take care of the child. A majority of those who did get help got it from welfare.

Seventy-four per cent of the respondents said that they did not feel that they had enough money to take care of their child. Twenty-one per cent said that they did have enough.

Seventy-six per cent of the respondents felt they did have enough food, while twenty-two per cent felt they did not.

Sixty-three per cent of the respondents felt that they had enough clothes; thirty-five per cent felt they did not.

Agencies

| | PERCENT | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ever Requested Support | Yes | No | NR |
| AFDC | 33 | 58 | 8 |
| Social Security | 25 | 66 | 9 |
| Headstart | 0 | 88 | 11 |
| Food Stamps | 39 | 54 | 7 |
| Free School Lunches | 62 | 34 | 4 |
| Disability | 2 | 86 | 12 |
| Commodities | 20 | 67 | 13 |
| Other | 0 | 82 | 18 |

For all types of aid except free school lunches a majority of respondents had never requested aid.

Presently Receiving Assistance

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 191 | 62 |
| No | 99 | 32 |
| NR | 17 | 6 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of respondents are currently receiving federal assistance.

| Amount from AFDC | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Up to 39 | 17 | 5 |
| 40-59 | 30 | 10 |
| 60-79 | 16 | 5 |
| 80-99 | 15 | 5 |
| 100- + | 33 | 11 |
| NR/NA | 196 | 64 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

About one third of the respondents reported that they were receiving AFDC of those who were receiving it, over half received less than $80 per month.

| Amount Social Security | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Up to $50 | 10 | 3 |
| 51-70 | 19 | 6 |
| 71-90 | 7 | 2 |
| 91-110 | 12 | 4 |
| 111-130 | 17 | 6 |
| 130- + | 16 | 5 |
| NR | 56 | 19 |
| Inap. | 170 | 55 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Three-fourths of the respondents reported that they were not receiving social security. Of those who were, one-half were receiving less than $110 per month.

Food Stamps

Sixty-five per cent of the respondents were not receiving food stamps currently, while 35 per cent were.

Free School Lunches

Fifty-three per cent were not currently receiving free school lunches, while 43 per cent were.

Disability

Eighty-two per cent were not currently receiving disability; one per cent were.

Commodities

Sixty-five per cent were not receiving commodities; 19 per cent were.

Other

Eighty-one per cent were not receiving other assistance; one per cent were.

| How Long Receiving Aid | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Less than one year | 21 | 7 |
| 1-2 | 50 | 16 |
| 3-4 | 44 | 14 |
| 5-6 | 24 | 8 |
| 7-8 | 8 | 3 |
| 9-10 | 10 | 3 |
| 11- + | 13 | 4 |
| DK | 6 | 2 |
| NR | 74 | 24 |
| Inap. | 57 | 19 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Of those respondents currently receiving aid, a majority had been receiving it from one to four years.

Assistance Received in Past Only

Eighty-eight per cent reported that they had not received assistance in the past; while seven per cent reported that they had.

As indicated in the description of the adopting families, they are poor people but their low income status was not reported to indicate care of the children was burdensome. Seventy-four per cent felt they did not have enough money but 76 per cent said they had enough food and 63 per cent enough clothing. Sixty-two per cent of the parent surrogates were receiving some type of public assistance. Thirty-five per cent were receiving aid for dependent children and 26 per cent were receiving social security and 35 per cent were receiving food stamps.

## HEALTH OF CHILDREN

A large majority (88 per cent) of the respondents reported that their child was in good or pretty good health. Only 3 per cent reported that he was in poor health.

| Health Problems | Yes | No | NR | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hungry at mealtime | 78 | 20 | 2 | 100 |
| Catch cold easily | 24 | 75 | 0 | 99 |
| Bites fingernails | 15 | 84 | 1 | 100 |
| Eyes hurt | 21 | 78 | 1 | 100 |
| Has sneezing spells | 12 | 87 | 1 | 100 |
| Sucks thumb | 92 | 6 | 2 | 100 |
| Unusually restless | 10 | 88 | 2 | 100 |
| Headaches | 29 | 69 | 2 | 100 |
| Tired in the morning | 2 | 95 | 2 | 99 |
| Wets bed | 9 | 89 | 2 | 100 |
| Feels sick in stomach | 12 | 86 | 2 | 100 |
| Bad dreams/nightmares | 11 | 86 | 2 | 99 |

Most children are free of any adverse symptoms; the most frequently reported problems are having headaches and catching cold easily.

| When Last Saw a Doctor | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Up to 6 months ago | 60 | 19 |
| 7 - 12 months ago | 76 | 25 |
| 1 - 2 years ago | 80 | 26 |
| 3 - + years ago | 20 | 6 |
| Never | 12 | 4 |
| Not since I had him | 20 | 6 |
| NR | 39 | 13 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 99 |

A majority reported that the child had seen a doctor within the last 2 years (70 per cent). Thirty-four per cent reported that he had been seen within the last year.

| Reason for Visit | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Physical exam | 55 | 18 |
| Cold | 66 | 21 |
| Broken bone | 8 | 3 |
| Asthma | 4 | 1 |
| Worms | 5 | 2 |
| Dentist | 35 | 11 |
| NR/NA | 134 | 44 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

The most frequent reasons for visiting a doctor were a cold or a physical exam. These two reasons accounted for a majority of the reported reasons.

Reported costs of visits were as follows:

| Cost of Visit (dollars) | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 19 and under | 103 | 77 |
| 20 - 49 | 16 | 12 |
| 50 - 79 | 5 | 4 |
| 80 - + | 10 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 134 | 100 |

In 45 per cent of the cases, the bill was not paid by the family. This included payment by medicaid, insurance, other federal programs, or free care. When the family did pay, they most frequently paid under $20.

Does Child Need to Go to a Doctor and Why

Eighty-three per cent of the respondents said they felt the child did not need to go to the doctor; while 15 per cent felt he did. The most frequently given reason was the need for a check-up (24 cases).

Why Haven't Taken

The most frequently given reason for not taking the child to a doctor is not having the money (27 cases).

Availability of Health Clinic

A majority of respondents said that there was a health clinic they could take the child to (73 per cent).

| Distance to Health Clinic | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Up to 5 miles | 45 | 15 |
| 6 - 10 | 52 | 17 |
| 11 - 15 | 57 | 18 |
| 16 - 20 | 36 | 12 |
| 21 - + | 38 | 12 |
| NR/NA | 79 | 26 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of the respondents reported that they had to travel up to 15 miles to a health clinic.

Handicapped

Only 3 per cent reported that a child was handicapped, and most of these reported that they were not receiving assistance for the child.

| Reason Easy or Difficult to Raise | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Obedient | 93 | 30 |
| Don't give much trouble | 95 | 31 |
| Generally better than other children | 10 | 3 |
| Sweetness | 13 | 4 |
| Other | 38 | 12 |
| NR/NA | 58 | 19 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

| General Temperament | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Quiet | 94 | 30 |
| Outgoing | 107 | 14 |
| Both | 45 | 15 |
| Other | 36 | 12 |
| NR | 25 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A similar per cent of children were described as outgoing and quiet.

| Mannerism | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Like mother | 133 | 43 |
| Like father | 21 | 9 |
| Like both | 12 | 4 |
| Other | 50 | 15 |
| NR | 90 | 29 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

In most cases, the children were said to resemble the mother in general mannerisms.

| Personal Behavior | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Affectionate | 166 | 54 |
| Help around house | 100 | 32 |
| Smart | 9 | 3 |
| Other | 8 | 3 |
| NR | 24 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of the children were reported to be affectionate (54 per cent).

| Feeling Toward Other Children | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Warm and/or loving | 126 | 41 |
| Other | 8 | 3 |
| NR/NA | 173 | 56 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

| Feelings of Other Children | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Warm and/or loving | 107 | 35 |
| Not jealous | 24 | 8 |
| Can't tell yet | 5 | 2 |
| NR/NA | 171 | 55 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

In a majority of cases the other children are reported to feel warm and/or loving toward the child taken in.

## LEGAL ADOPTION

The parent surrogates interviewed reported that they had never seriously considered legal adoption of the children they had taken to rear. Apparently, they did not understand the procedure that resulted in legal adoption. The replies to questions about legal adoption indicated a failure to understand the concept.

### Attempts at Knowledge of Legal Adoption

Ninety-three per cent of the respondents said that they never tried to adopt the child legally. Only five per cent said that they tried.

### Do You Want to Adopt him Legally

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 262 | 85 |
| No | 37 | 12 |
| NR | 8 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of the parent surrogates did not want to adopt the child legally.

Why Haven't Done It

The most frequently given responses is that the parents wouldn't sign the papers, followed in frequency by the response that they didn't have money and that they just haven't gotten around to it.

Know of Anyone Who Has Gone to Court to Adopt Child Legally

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 25 | 8 |
| No | 275 | 90 |
| NR | 7 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

A majority of parents said that they would not now try to adopt a child through an agency.

If Yes, Why

Of the few people who said they would, the most frequently given reason was that "if I could," followed by "if they let me pick the child out", "would be company and help", and "if someone that I know would ask me, I would".

If No, Why Not

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| I don't need to adopt no children | 91 | 30 |
| Too old or unhealthy | 43 | 14 |
| Enough children now | 15 | 5 |
| Don't have needed money | 15 | 5 |
| Parents wouldn't allow it | 15 | 5 |
| Inap. | 31 | 10 |
| NR | 97 | 31 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

Respondents most often said that they just didn't need any more children. Some also said that they were getting too old to look after children.

Most frequently, respondents said that they didn't want to or weren't interested in getting a child that way.

Would You Now Try to Adopt a Child Through an Agency

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 20 | 6 |
| No | 191 | 63 |
| NR | 96 | 31 |
| TOTAL | 307 | 100 |

## CONCLUSIONS

Our investigation of informal adoption in the two selected rural counties in Alabama seems to clarify some of the circumstances of child rearing by persons other than their natural parents. What appears to be salient facts are presented below.

Parent-Surrogates

1. Kinship ties are of primary signifance. More than 90 per cent of the parent-surrogates were relatives of the child. This indicates a prevailing sense of family responsibility for children.

   Opinion was expressed that young women felt free to have children because of the feeling that someone in the extended family would care for the child if they did not.

2. Approximately one-half (47 per cent) of the children were in homes where there was a single female parent.

3. Four-fifths (79 per cent) of the parent-surrogates were fifty years old or older.

4. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of the parent-surrogates had no children of their own in the household.

5. Fifty-nine per cent of the families had five or fewer members and forty-one per cent were in families of six or more members.

6. Only 38 per cent of the families had monthly incomes of more than $250.00.

7. One-half of the families had 6 years or less schooling. Only 6 per cent had 12 years or more schooling.

The model parent-surrogate was an older, low-income woman related to the child with little education and,

in terms of income, at the poverty level.

Relationship with Natural Parents

1. Reasons given for taking the child to rear were predominantly a matter of family responsibility and parental convenience.

2. One-half of the parent-surrogates expressed the belief that there was no alternative to their taking the child to rear. Thirty per cent said that if they had not agreed to take the child, it would have remained with the mother or would have been taken care of by someone else in the family.

3. Practically all of the parent-surrogates felt that the child was permanently a member of the household.

4. Seventy per cent of the children were a year old or less when taken to rear. Sixty-three per cent of the mothers of the children were under age 25, when they gave up the child.

5. Ninety-eight per cent of the children knew that the parent-surrogate was not their natural parent. This fact did not seem to cause concern on the part of the child and all reports were that the child's relationships with other children were amicable where there were other children in the household.

6. Relationships of the natural mothers with the child and parent-surrogate were maintained. Seventy-five per cent of the parent-surrogates reported having amicable relationships with the natural mother. This may be compared with relationships being maintained between the parent-surrogate and child with the natural father. Fifty per cent of the parent-surrogates reported they got along poorly with the natural father.

7. Only 2 per cent of the natural parents had sought to recover the child from parent-surrogate.

8. In over half of the cases (56 per cent) neither of the natural parents provides any support for the child and when assistance is given, it is more than likely to come from the mother.

Circumstances of the Child

1. Sixty-three per cent of the parent-surrogates reported that they got no assistance in care of the child.

2. Three-fourths of the parent-surrogates reported that they had inadequate money and food to rear the child.

3. Only three per cent reported children as not being in good health. Forty-four per cent of the children had seen a doctor in the past twelve months. Eighty-three per cent of parent-surrogates felt the children did not need to see a doctor.

4. Parent's satisfaction with their children was expressed in the conclusions that in less than 2 per cent of the cases was the child difficult to rear and that in forty-one per cent of these cases children were reported as not giving the parent-surrogate much trouble.

Apparent satisfaction with the informal adoption arrangement was expressed. Only six per cent said they would seek to adopt a child through an agency. Ninety per cent said they did not know anyone who had sought to legally adopt children. Legal adoption seems simply not to be in the culture of these rural people.

From the DuBois study of Farmville, Virginia in the 1890s to the present, this form of child care has been reported. Questions about the practice have been raised all the time. Would not legal adoption be better? Would they not fare better in Birmingham or Chicago or in any city where their parents may

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